

Perfect devastation

South Look/ Mariner Newspapers October 28-29, 1998

Author's storm tale brings flood of memories for South Shore

By Alice C. Coyle
STAFF WRITER

When Sebastian Junger began work on "The Perfect Storm" four years ago, he had no idea it would even make the New York Times Best Seller list — let alone hold the top spot for more than a year. When Junger's thrilling, tragic and very true story fell to number two below the controversial Starr Report a few weeks back, the author was more amused than disappointed.

"If anything was going to knock it down, I thought it was pretty funny that it was the Starr Report," Junger said in a telephone interview from his home in New York City.

A Belmont native, who summered on the Cape, Junger was living in Gloucester when the devastating "no name" storm of October 1991 came ashore. Junger saw first hand

the crushing blow the October hurricane — actually the combination of three storm systems, including the remnants of Hurricane Grace — dealt to homes and businesses in the seaside town.

Up and down the coast the storm wreaked havoc, surprising forecasters and residents by both its duration and ferocity. In Scituate, the South Shore community hardest hit by the storm, Junger's book provides another perspective, while conjuring up a flood of personal memories about the horrible Halloween hurricane of 1991 and the damage it did locally. While no lives were lost on the South Shore, the storm hit the coastal communities of Hull, Marshfield and Scituate hard. Overall damage estimates in Scituate alone, topped \$100 million.

On the North Shore, Junger was

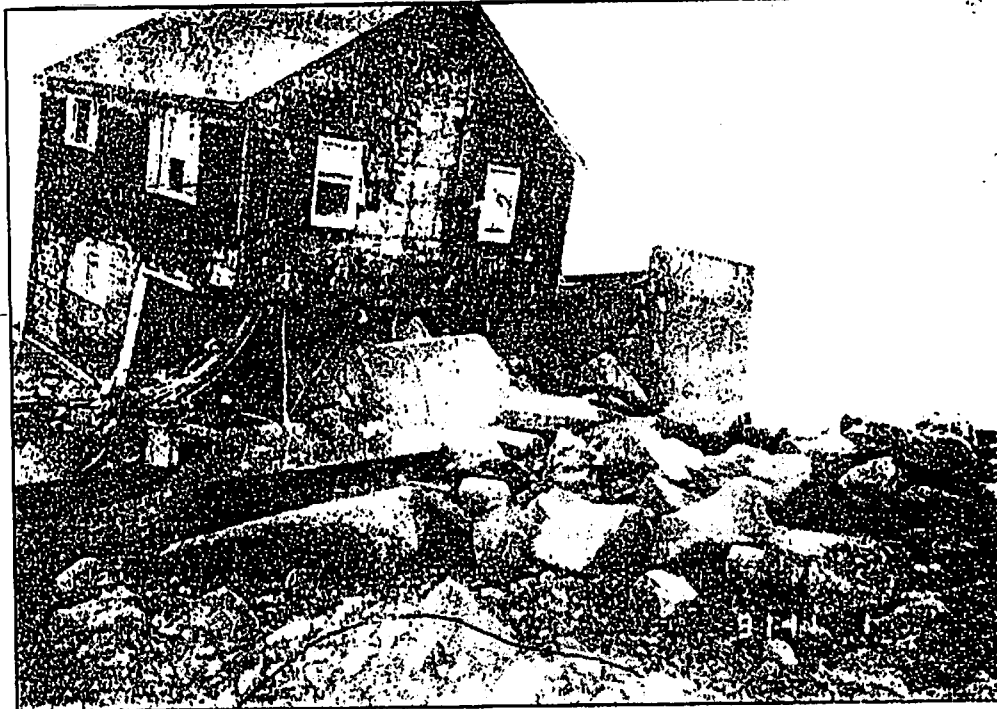


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More than 100 waterfront homes were damaged or destroyed during the "no name" storm of 1991.

working as a climber for a tree removal company and trying his hand at free-lance writing in the days and months following the storm, when he decided to take on a bigger writing project.

"I had been thinking about writing a book on dangerous jobs," said Junger, who had a birds eye view of one of the country's most hazardous professions daily, focused on fishermen — specifically the six-man crew of the ill-fated Andrea Gail.

On its way back from a late season fishing trip to the Grand Banks, the 72-foot-long swordfish boat was caught in the center of the unnamed storm and sunk with all hands on board.

And the Andrea Gail wasn't the

only vessel losing its battle in the storm's fury. Junger retells the story of the Air National Guardsmen who risked their lives to save others and wound up fighting for their own after having to "ditch" their helicopter in the raging

ocean. The story of the crew aboard the sail boat Satori, rescued during the height of the storm is also told in "The Perfect Storm."

By interviewing fishermen, the family members and friends of the Andrea Gail's crew, and others who weathered the storm and survived, Junger was able to introduce readers to those at the heart of the story, reinforcing the fact that they are real people, not simply characters in a book. Through these interviews, Junger brings a personal touch to the re-telling of this tragic story.

Accurate facts were important in recreating the story. And through three years of research — working with experts in all facets of the boating and fishing industry and meteorologists, Junger was able to provide the intricate details that give both the author and his first novel credibility. It also makes for fascinating reading.

Author's storm tale brings flood of memories



Hatherly Road near Scituate's Misquashicut Pond was impassable to all but four-wheel drive vehicles following the Oct. 30-31 Nor'easter.

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If 16 months on the best sellers list isn't impressive enough for his first time out, Junger's book is now being made into a movie. Junger is consulting with Warner Bros. on the screen play for the upcoming film and The Learning Channel recently aired an hour-long television program based on the events recounted in Junger's book complete with interviews with the people involved.

Fishermen, boaters and residents from all over coastal Massachusetts who lived through the storm were drawn to the book immediately. Long time Scituate resident and

the book brought the no-name storm back into focus. Friday marks its seventh anniversary and while countless other nor'easters have blown into town before and since, the 1991 storm stands out.

"What surprised us was the severity of the storm," recalled Scott. After the storm surge subsided and the final high tide on Oct. 31 crept back out, \$1.6 million in damages had been caused to the town's public facilities — including seawalls and roads, Scott said. Recalling the devastation of the Blizzard of '78, most residents closest to the water didn't wait to evacuate and move

sailor Bernard MacKenzie and the crew that sails with him aboard his 33-foot Friendship Sloop Voyager put "The Perfect Storm" at the top of their summer reading list this year.

"Boats in the harbor were just pulverized. There were dinghies flying through the air."

ASSISTANT HARBORMASTER
MARK PATTERSON

But what has surprised Junger is the enormous interest in the book from all over the country. "No one thought starting out that this book would be this big," Junger notes.

Paul Scott, engineering director for Scituate's Department of Public Works just

finished the book. Like others who surveyed the storm's damage from the coastline, Scott said after reading about the fate of the Andrea Gail, he was taken by its fury at sea.

For Scott, and others in Scituate

inland. "I think '78 taught us a good lesson in preparedness," Scott noted.

Hatherly and Glades Roads were washed out and impassable, as was Oceanside Drive and several other roadways. On Surfside Road a section of seawall succumbed leaving homes exposed to the waves' wrath. Homes that were not toppled off foundations, were buried in the "overwash" — sand, boulders and rocks tossed over seawalls by tides that ran at 18 feet. In all, more than 100 homes were damaged or destroyed in the no-name storm.

Boats were the other big casualty during the storm. More than 100 vessels, many recreational, were still moored in the harbor, despite the time of year. By the time the storm receded, several vessels had been tossed up on the beaches like toy boats. Some sank, and still others moored together in the harbor

were smashed into bits. Harbormaster Elmer Pooler reported that 28 vessels came ashore, six boats sank and the Mill Wharf Marina floated off its pilings, and landed beside the harbormasters office on Cole Parkway with 25 boats tied to it.

"One boat was tossed right on top of the Coast Guard Station Pier. We had never seen that before," Pooler said.

Assistant Harbormaster Mark Patterson was like Pooler, trapped

in the Harbormaster's office during the storm. Four feet of water had turned Cole Parkway into a river and all the harbormasters could do was wait it out the



Seawalls were leveled during the storm, leaving dozens of homes exposed to the full fury of the ocean.

storm. "Boats in the harbor were just pulverized," recalled Patterson. "There were dinghies flying through the air." Boat, marina and pier damages totaled nearly \$3 million, Pooler said.

Fortunately, no one in Scituate suffered the fate of the Gloucester fishermen. As a new season of nor'easters gets underway, Junger's book may serve as the most potent storm warning to those on land and sea.



Several of the more than 100 boats still moored in Scituate Harbor were tossed ashore some landing on nearby homes.

See also page 10 for more on the storm, and page 11 for more on the damage to the harbor.